



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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POLAR BEARS TAKEN ON ICE FLOES 200 MILES AT SEA

White hunters are leading the native two to one in the taking of polar bear, the Department of the Interior reports.

The white man has the edge because he can--and does--fly as far as 200 miles from the Alaska shores to spot the big white bruin lolling on an ice floe.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, keeps as close record as possible of the kill--the only action it can take on high seas killing for there is no control of hunting polar bear beyond the 6-mile limit. Regulations issued under the Alaska game law provide for a continuous season in Territorial areas, but limits the kill to one bear per hunter per year and protects female bears accompanied by cubs.

Until a year or two ago the polar bear was well protected by the conditions under which it lives. The few killed for trophies and those killed for food and cover did not upset nature's plan to any considerable degree.

Then the airplane, which went North for business, widened its sphere and became a vehicle of recreation--including long flights over the ice-flecked ocean to spot bears far from the shore. That's when, and probably why, the white man's take of these animals went up.

Until more is known about polar bear population; until more is known about the number of cubs born each year and the number which become adults under their normal conditions; in fact until there is a considerable amount added to the current skimpy knowledge of the biology of the polar bear, no one can say what rate of kill the species can stand.

However, there is some evidence that the kill of polar bears is two or three times as high as it was five years ago. Between late February this year, when the current hunting pressure started, until April 20 the white hunters had taken 61

bears and the natives had bagged 30. Figures as of mid-May showed that the total had climbed to 127 but the percentage was still two to one or better for the white man. The kill will climb a bit more but is not expected to reach the 206 figure attained last year.

Hunters report that the drop in kill this year is due to lack of hunters rather than lack of bear. Last year, however, the "farthest out" a bear was reported taken was 60 miles. This year the hunters went out 200 miles. One reason given for this extra mileage is the fact that winds and currents this year drifted a huge ice pack farther from the Alaska shore and over towards Siberia and that the bears went with the ice. Anyway, half a dozen years ago the known kill of polar bear hovered close to 50, much less than this year's take and only a fraction of the take of 1957.

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